

The Barnes Foundation

Journal of the Art Department

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Journal of the Art Department

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The essays appearing in the issues of this Journal will be derived from the work of advanced seminar students, alumni, and members of the staff of the Foundation's Art Department. Publication will occur on an irregular basis.

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The Barnes Foundation Gallery

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Method

by VIOLETTE DE MAZIA

THE confusion prevailing in the world of art has long been notorious. The roots of art lie so deep in human nature that every normal human being is capable of esthetic understanding and enjoyment; but for every person who enters into possession of his birthright a thousand either remain in blank ignorance of what art is and what it could mean for them, or else they are paralyzed by institutional prestige, corrupted by commercialism or left defenseless against charlatans intent only on victimizing them. Even to the uninstructed, the natural appeal of art is so great that interest in it springs up spontaneously on all sides and at the slightest provocation. Left without guidance, however, the interest speedily withers and dies of inanition. Or, what is worse, art becomes a pastime for the idle and frivolous, a pretext for self-display, an adjunct to social climbing, a happy hunting-ground for faddists and sentimentalists. These consequences do great disservice to the cause of art, which they make synonymous in the public mind with pretentious affectation, if not with a riot of emotionalism—things in like degree deplorable to anyone who values his intellectual integrity.

If we turn from the amateur esthete to the professional, to the typical art-critic or teacher in the academy of art or the university, we discover a spectacle even more depressing.

What were more or less casual fads and fancies here become entrenched superstitions buttressed by institutional authority, with all the weight of institutional inertia to support them. Upon matriculating at such a college or academy, the student encounters a body of doctrines which are presented to him as being substantially on a par with the multiplication table and the Decalogue in authoritativeness and little more, if at all, subject to discussion or debate. What is certain is that these doctrines are about equally irrelevant to the creation or the understanding of art, as the student discovers for himself the moment he undertakes to extract any actual guidance from them either in the practical problems of painting or in the interpretation of actual works of art, past or present. He may, it is true, be taught a formula or set of technical devices, but these are worse than useless; offered not as suggestions but laid down as categorical imperatives, they can only narrow his perceptions and cripple his powers. He also learns very quickly that the view of art inculcated at his particular institution is hotly contested at other institutions, and ones of apparently equal repute at that. He may be taught that the canons of art were discovered centuries ago and exemplified once and for all in the work of Leonardo, Michelangelo and Raphael and that all departures from these models are esthetic heresies, to be suppressed if possible or, this failing, to be derided and branded in any case as evidence of esthetic illiteracy. At the same time he learns from a friend at a neighboring college or art academy that these same painters, as likewise Giotto, Titian, Rembrandt, Rubens, Renoir and Cézanne, belong to an antediluvian stage of art before artists had learned that art means freedom; that freedom is lost when art attempts to present any recognizable object; that art is "pure" spontaneity, "pure" inspiration, "pure" form, which knowledge or the operation of intelligence would cripple or destroy; and finally, that objections to "abstractionism" on the score of its unintelligibility or relative paucity or shallowness of meaning merely demonstrate critical blindness to "pure esthetic value." Caught in this clash of rival dogmatisms, each equally cocksure, both equally remote from any basis in intelligence or experience, the student becomes

baffled and bewildered and either gives up entirely or else resigns himself to still further groping in the dark.

The stock academic view of esthetic value as established by precedent and the most recent will-o'-the-wisp of "pure" abstractionism (or "non-objectivism" or "abstract expressionism") are merely illustrative of the superstitions and myths that confuse the understanding of art. All suffer alike from the fatal defect of never establishing contact with the actual works of art which they ostensibly undertake to explain and clarify. All represent generalizations imposed upon art, some critic's preconception of what art *must* signify or the results it *must* be designed to produce. Occasionally some do contain a measure of truth, though always with omissions and distortions; but, since none really starts from objective facts or proceeds by rigorously analytic methods, none can ever be verified, hence all must remain doctrinaire pronouncements rather than enlightening scientific demonstrations.

Confronted with this chaos of claims and counter-claims, the student might easily succumb to despair; he would find ground for hope, however, if he remembered that for many centuries a similar chaos prevailed in the interpretation of natural phenomena. Except for a few connections so obvious that it was practically impossible to overlook them—such as that fire burns, that food nourishes, that water runs down-hill and that unsupported bodies fall—virtually nobody knew anything about what causes what, and everyone had unlimited license to explain what was happening in any way that suited his fancy. Superstition reigned unchecked and would surely still be reigning today if men had not gradually discovered that they were paying too high a price for the freedom to believe anything they liked. Irksome as it may be to renounce the illusion of omniscience, the disposition to believe only what is attested by observation and experiment pays dividend in actual coin, while the dreamer always eventually wakes up . . . empty-handed. What is attested by observation and experiment is, however, simply another way of saying what is verifiable by scientific method; and we shall now consider how deliverance from

confusion and chaos may be anticipated by recourse to scientific method in the field of art.

Obviously, to apply the scientific method we must begin by defining "art"—a term already defined to mean many things, from "expression of emotion" or "expression of a wish" to "significant form," "the whole soul of man in activity" and "the disimprisonment of the soul of fact." The last two definitions may be found inspiring by people who yearn to palpitate, and the third undoubtedly has the additional charm of the esoteric, since it can mean anything to anybody; but all have the fatal flaw of telling something *about* art, instead of stating *what it is*.^{*} For the present we shall use the term in the least complex and most straightforward sense possible, simply to mean the record of what some individual perceives of an esthetic nature.[†] It may mean all the other things, too, and indeed many more, but this definition makes the fewest assumptions and indicates as unambiguously as possible exactly what is referred to when the term is employed. Its meaning depends, however, on a clear understanding of what the act of perceiving consists of and a thorough grasp of the distinction between what Professor John Dewey terms "recognition" and perception itself—a distinction as crucial as it is generally neglected.

Most of the time, what we are doing when we believe we are perceiving is merely recognizing familiar objects and situations and making stereotyped responses to them; not by any stretch of the imagination are we reacting with all the powers of our mind and body. We say that we see a chair, a book, a table, when what we really mean is that we identify them as objects of a familiar kind, while we pay no attention whatever to the proportions or the color of the

* Courses in art at colleges and universities for the most part discuss painters rather than paintings, and reams are written on the symbolic interpretation of the artist's subjects rather than on the attributes of the created objects—the painted canvases.

† Broad human qualities (delicacy, power, drama, etc.) and their esthetic aspects are art's domain. Esthetic aspects are inherent in situations that we can enjoy for what they are, *i.e.*, find them to be "good," "right," "of interest" for what we get from them *as we perceive them* and not for what they might be "good" or "of interest" for or function as. And these are the aspects of the world that the artist's work brings to focus and enriches in his own personal manner.

chair, the format of the book or the grain of the wood in the table. Again, we recognize the face and the voice of the person seated across the table from us and perhaps gather from his facial expression and the tones in which he speaks that he is cheerful or worried or angry, but the actual overtones which give his voice its distinctive timbre or the play of light and shadow over his features almost certainly escape us. For an explanation of this habitual human blindness we must turn to psychology, especially to the psychology of perception in relation to habit and interest.

It is a truism that the instruments of perception are the sense organs which link us to the world outside. Impressions reaching us through our eyes and ears are valueless, however, unless we can interpret them. Furthermore, they have meaning only when we can bring to bear on them the record or residue of past experience.

At any moment, the sum total of our actual sensations is a chaos: we are besieged by a medley of sights, sounds, feelings of warmth or coolness, of bodily comfort or discomfort, by far the greater part of which have no connection with one another, and which could not possibly enter into any single experience. To be conscious of anything in particular, to retain our sanity, we must disregard nearly all of them, fixing our attention upon those which fit into some intelligible scheme or picture. But the connections which bring about intelligibility, which "make sense," have all been learned from past experience; this experience, retained in memory, is called forth as occasion for it arises. It then directs our attention to the significant aspects of the existing situation, to which it gives form and meaning—which, in a word, it enables us to perceive.

We have all had the experience of being in an unfamiliar situation, and finding ourselves unable to see more than a fraction of what is going on in it. The machinery in the hold of a steamship, the babel of voices when many people are speaking in a foreign language, the actions of those with whose manners, customs, and traditions we are unfamiliar—all these things are likely to appear to us as so much confusion and blur. Our difficulty is both that we do not see and that we do not comprehend. . . . It is only after, and by means of, understanding, that we can perceive with any precision, or

notice more than a small part of the details in the scene before us. What we do see is hazy, scanty, and without perspective. We overlook the important and significant, and the odds and ends that come to our attention are jumbled together without rhyme or reason. Our senses, meanwhile, may be as acute as those of another who misses nothing in the picture; but we have not learned to use them, and he has.*

Perception, in brief, involves possession of a fund of meanings deposited by the experiences of the past. It also involves the systematic interconnection and organization of these meanings by the establishment of mental habits or, more precisely, by thinking—a process which may be described as the formation of interests. Little or nothing would be accomplished by a resolution to note carefully the appearance of everything which meets our eye unless we had some permanent purpose in view to which the things registered could be referred; indeed, the undertaking would be destined to failure from the start because of the infinite variety over which our attention would necessarily be dispersed. A like difficulty would be encountered by anyone who attempted to judge for himself about the truth or falsity of every assertion he heard anyone make without consulting the recorded knowledge built up by the systematic investigation which goes by the name of science. Relying exclusively on his own efforts such an individual would be compelled to rediscover for himself everything that is included in mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, psychology and history—to mention only the outstanding divisions of knowledge. Obviously, anything of the sort would be impossible, and impossible likewise would be the attempt to find out what things and situations in the world of art look like and signify without learning to know the traditions of art.

With this reference to the traditions of art we reach the heart of the problem of learning to “see,” *i.e.*, to perceive in a given situation what is significant when that situation is considered from a specific point of interest. A work of art, it was indicated earlier, is the record of some individual’s

* A. C. Barnes, *The Art in Painting*, pp. 5–6, Harcourt, Brace & Co., New York, 1937,

perception; but this statement says nothing about the values embodied in perception: these may be trite, tedious, mawkishly sentimental or theatrically bombastic; or they may be a revelation in terms of innumerable qualities that enrich the material of the world in ways hitherto undreamed of.

Ability to judge of the values of art depend on the acknowledgement that they represent the most concentrated elucidation we have of the ways of seeing that have commended themselves to the most gifted individuals over the longest periods of time. Just as our standards of thinking, our norms of validity in reflection, have been set by Plato, Aristotle, Galileo, Newton, Darwin and so on, so our standards of value in art have been derived from the work of Giotto, Piero della Francesca, Giorgione, Titian, Tintoretto, El Greco, Rembrandt and their successors down to Renoir, Cézanne and some of our own contemporaries. This is not to say that these artists are all on the same level and certainly not that they all represent the same kind of eminence. Each tradition does represent, however, a constantly followed type of design, comprehensively employed—the Florentine, for example, in terms primarily of line and three-dimensionality, the Venetian in terms of color-glow and structural quality (though, of course, line in the Venetians and color in the Florentines are adequate to maintain pictorial conviction). The first problem, in other words, for anyone interested in learning to see as the artist sees is that of acquiring a familiarity with the great traditions as they have developed through the ages. This, and only this, will provide him with the background requisite for any further progress.

Superficially regarded, the view just outlined may seem to revert to the academic assumption discarded earlier—that the laws governing expression were established long ago and that the whole duty of the contemporary artist is to follow them as closely as he can. This would be a gross misunderstanding. The essence of academicism is to take traditions out of their historical context and to view them as eternally valid apart from any use that may be made of them. Our view is, on the other hand, that they are immensely valuable, in fact indispensable, as sources of suggestions, of working

hypotheses which may be applied to the artist's own individual problems, but also that each age has distinctive problems of its own and that merely to repeat the past is to sink to the status of a parasite upon it. Indeed, if history teaches any lesson at all, it is that critics who invoke the authority of the past to settle contemporary issues, the so-called (and mis-called) "classicists," have at all times been the most implacable enemies of the new and the vital and have never recanted their opposition until age has begun to wither the novelties of their day. The academician, in other words, since he has no method of discovering objective realities, always identifies the new by its surface-qualities and, consequently, is always a generation out of date.

When the student of art has begun to acquire an objective knowledge of the traditions, he is in a position to make further fruitful application of the objective or scientific method. Instead of relying on the *ipse dixits* of a teacher, he comes to grips with the work of art itself, its inherent qualities of light, line, color and space and the design, the artist's over-all intent, in accordance with which those qualities are arranged and harmonized. With the objective facts before him, he can formulate any problem in terms which will be intelligible to another observer, elaborate whatever hypotheses may present themselves and find confirmation which not only satisfies him but is capable of commanding the assent of all those qualified to judge.

The scientific, or objective, method, as indicated in the above procedure, is the basis of all legitimate, effective thinking and is as applicable to the study of art as it is to any other field of human accomplishment. If the question, for example, is one of authorship of a disputed painting, the relevant evidence will be found in the general type of design employed, perhaps in the peculiarities of technique, the color-scheme, the type of relationships used to establish compositional unity. One of the disputants may fail to establish even a *prima facie* case, or the verdict may be "probable, but not certain"; but whatever the outcome, there will be progress towards a solution, *provided* that all references be made in objective terms and that merely subjective preference or

unanalyzed prestige be allowed to play no part in determining the outcome.

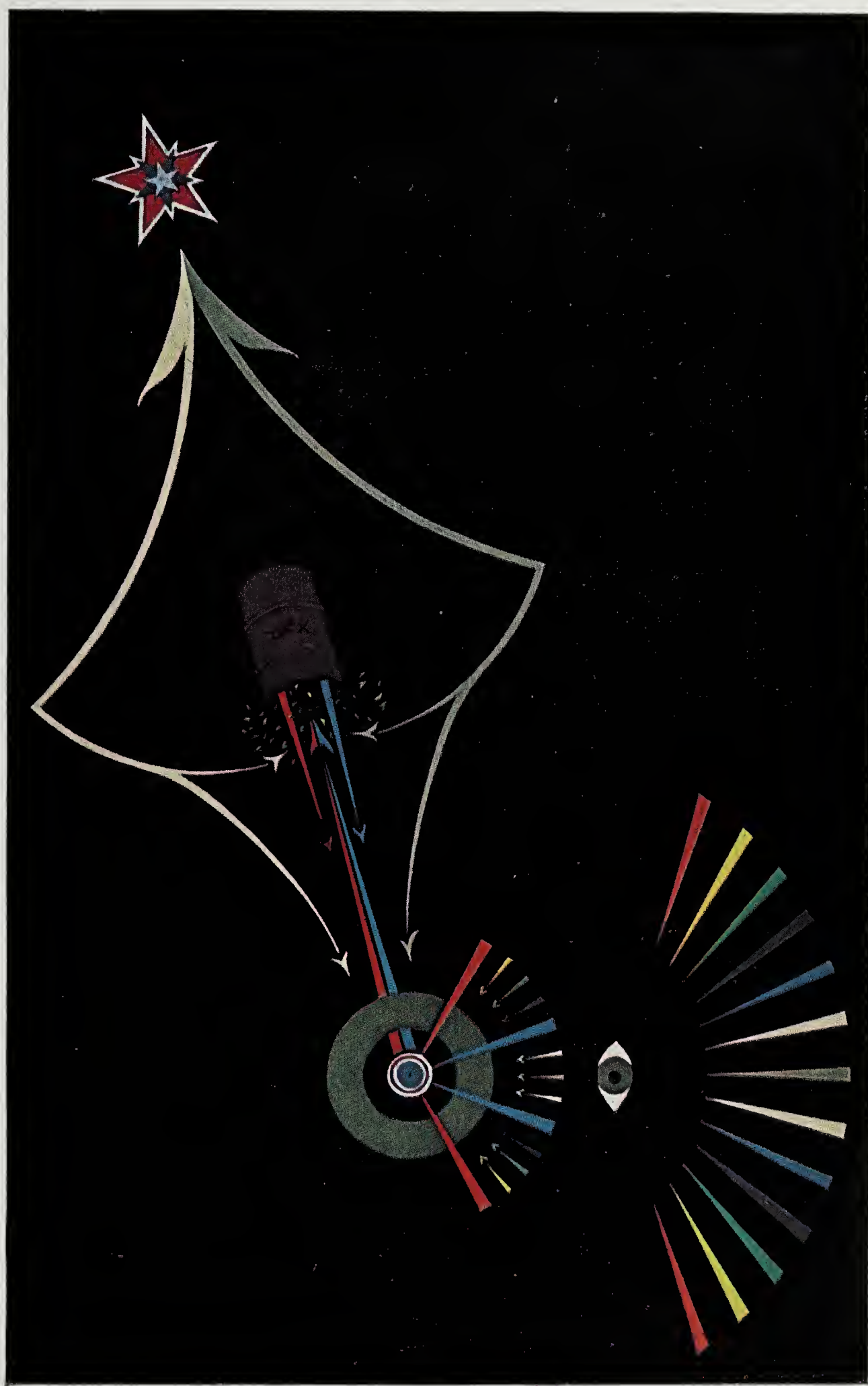
Or let us assume that the question is one of the value of a new development in painting. When Matisse's first characteristic paintings began to be exhibited, they were dismissed as the work of a "*fauve*"—a wild creature; and certainly by all academic standards the color was harsh and discordant, the perspective was hopelessly awry, the flesh bore practically no resemblance to actual human flesh. A hasty observer or one unversed in traditions originating outside of Western culture, hence unfamiliar to the average Western man, could hardly have done anything but reject the pictures as willfully obscure and repulsively ugly. Knowledge of the Oriental tradition, however, and the capacity to perceive the essential qualities of many European traditions would have given the judicious observer pause and induced him to suspend judgement until he could give due weight to the hypothesis that the novelty was valid because of its genuine grounding in a wider traditional setting than he was accustomed to consider. On the other hand, not all Matisses are successful as works of art; the glamor of the new may be as misleading as the prestige of the old; and recourse to analysis in objective terms may reveal that a particular painting by Matisse shows a stereotyping of his usually successful form, drabness of color when brightness would better serve his purpose or modification of a Persian or Japanese source so slight as to verge upon plagiarism. In this case, however, as in the one just preceding, the objective method vindicates itself in that it provides for its own correction; discussion remains potentially fruitful so long as it does not take refuge in sheer assertion or blind preference. When, in contrast, discussion is at liberty to go off at a tangent without warning and to introduce alleged causes or principles that have no existence anywhere but in the critic's imagination, what might be intelligent analysis degenerates into empty verbiage, pure fantasy or unadulterated idiocy. The classic illustration is Walter Pater's celebrated rhapsody on the *Mona Lisa*, and parallels are to be found on practically every occasion when a voluble academician feels free to indulge his expansive impulses and runs amok.

What the objective method promises, in brief, is deliverance from mirages and idle chatter and a real grasp of what the artist embodied in his pictures. Guided by it, the student may reasonably hope to develop his own power to perceive relationships of esthetic significance, as well as to distinguish between the true and the false, the important and the trivial, the means and the end. He is no longer in danger of confusing unity with monotony or variety with chaos, individuality with eccentricity or distinction with ostentatiousness. He will be alive to the difference between the creative and the academic use of tradition and between servile imitation of nature and the artist's "remolding" of it to bring it "nearer to the heart's desire." The objective method, in summary, provides a key to the understanding of our world as transfigured by the deep insight and powerful imagination of the artist and thus makes us sharers in the artist's experience.

Underlying this objective approach is, as we have already indicated, the complicated process of perception, which the accompanying diagram may be taken to symbolize.* Our eye, normal and at rest, registers within its field of vision everything of light and color that it is able physiologically to register (it does not, for example, register either ultra-violet or infra-red wavelengths of light). This broad stream of stimuli impinging on the eye—represented in the diagram by the arrows at lower left—is transmitted to our consciousness—symbolized here by the two small concentric circles (respectively, red and blue) on white ground above the eye, the outer circle (red) indicating the *margin*, the inner circle (blue), the *focus of consciousness*. A welter of stimuli is, of course, in constant competition for a place in this inner circle, and no focus of consciousness or attention would be possible except for the factor of *interest*—the broad brown band around the concentric circles—in general and at the moment, which acts to screen out all stimuli but those on which it wishes to concentrate. These chosen few are indicated by the arrows penetrating to the concentric circles.

Interest differs, necessarily, with the individual, being

* From the visual standpoint here and, when appropriately adjusted, from the standpoint of all other avenues of sense perception.



PERCEPTION

what it is in each person because of a number of variable factors—inherited tendencies, environment, training, education, habits and the cumulative effect of circumstances on personality. Furthermore, its keenness, its aliveness, is determined by our physical and mental health, the force of our curiosity and the strength of our desire to learn, to develop our imaginative powers and to grow. Finally, interest is aroused or incited to activity by our emotional state; in fact, life being essentially a matter of feeling, the entire process of experience, of perception, takes place against a setting, a sounding board—shown in the diagram by the black setting—of our *emotions* and sensations.

This points up the next phase in perception: whatever part of the external world reaches the focus of our attention, continuing, at the same time, under the jurisdiction of our interest and our feelings, touches our *background*—the storehouse of meanings accumulated from previous experience, what psychologists refer to as our *apperceptive mass*. Here meanings are held in reserve, being funded, as it were, residing in our subconscious as, to use Santayana's phrase, "hushed reverberations," but ready to re-acquire immediate, definite, assertive identity at the first demand of the stimuli, the latter having the effect of, to again borrow terms from Santayana, the "spark in a powder keg."

Touched off in this manner our background content "explodes" into our consciousness (this is, by the way, the stage of perception exploited by Freudian psychologists: what comes up first from our background, conscious control not having time to act, reveals the activities and tendencies we unconsciously harbor). In this process of perception both *intelligence* and *imagination*, co-operating automatically with our interest and prodded by our feelings, control this activity of the background material and guide our use of it as clues to the significance of the sense-registered situation—albeit clues we entertain provisionally as hypotheses to be checked against the registered "facts."

This process within a process is not without its own complexities. For example, the individuals whom William James describes as "the once-born" (in contradistinction to those he calls "the twice-born") accept any and all clues that come

up from their background *just as they come up*. The school-teacher at the museum talking to her group of students about a Titian portrait and telling them how much it resembles her grandfather and what a wonderful person *he* was does precisely this, going off at a tangent from the purported point of her discussion of the Titian, sentimentally straggling after one of the background, *her* background, clues. For her, as perhaps for the class, the moment is an emotional jag rather than an experience of the Titian; it is also far from being a perception of the painter's meaning.

In an instance of genuine perception, on the other hand, intelligence, guided by as well as guiding our interest as the latter is aroused by the registered facts, not only directs the bringing-up, the selection of whatever associative meanings our interest demands but also identifies the tangent we are *not* to follow. And once relevant connection between background and registered facts has been established, there develops a continuous interaction between the in-coming report of the now-to-be-experienced situation and the relevant "clues" held in readiness by the background, an interaction in which the original stimulus and the background material mutually affect one another.

This psychological phenomenon is shown in the diagram as follows: the keg represents the *funded experience* that makes up our background, and while perception is in process this keg is the scene of ceaseless activity. We are, for example, deliberating whether the flesh in a Renoir nude is flesh-like or whether it has been imaginatively perceived by the artist, and we are weighing evidence in favor of each alternative; hence, arrows are shown going in both directions between keg, our background, and the concentric circles and broad band, the focus of our consciousness and our interest, the latter sorting out stimuli relevant to this deliberation—a process involving *intelligence*, *i.e.*, adaptive thinking and action, and *imagination*, both represented in the diagram by the long double arrows which curve above and below the central areas. Until this process is complete, we cannot be sure whether any particular impression of the stimuli or any particular suggestion on the part of our background is rational or merely imaginary, *i.e.*, true or false.

We cannot minimize the part of imagination, for it is imagination, hand in hand with interest and intelligence, which always suggests further search into possibilities and “finds the M”, as William James says, *i.e.*, establishes the necessary connections between what we know and what we seek to know—a condition we indicate metaphorically when we say the past throws light upon the present; that is, we see the new, whether consciously or unconsciously, in the light of our knowledge of the old. Once all evidence has been sifted and weighed and a definite conclusion has been reached, we decide, we know, (to continue the above instance) that Renoir has imparted to the texture and surface of the nude’s flesh a mother-o’-pearl iridescence, a milky luminosity and a satin smoothness and gleam; the *emergent situation*—symbolized by the star at the upper right in the diagram—marks the *completion of the particular experience*, and this is synonymous with perception. Neither experience nor perception can, therefore, possibly exist without the other. Perception of meaning is born in the interlocking activity of all the links in the process and starts to be born with the first *interested* look.*

The process of apprehension, deliberation and perception described in the above example is, of course, one of classification with facts already known; it is the process of simple recognition—the first step to a *total* experience or perception of *specific* meanings. The entire journey involves further recognitions, each one qualifying the other by intelligent use of the imagination and adjusting more precisely the emotion aroused. Here, for instance, the flesh as painted by Renoir may suddenly be recognized, identified further as having a Boucher type of opalescence and the semi-translucency of porcelain, or it may be perceived as a shape either dramatically or gently silhouetted against another brightly illuminated but darker area; and we might feel indifferent or curious about the technique employed or, in one way or another, esthetically excited, as the case may be. It is only then that we truly “react” to the situation, when intelligently and imaginatively we *act back* with what we possess of relevant meanings *at what acts upon us*.

* or, in general, interested sense registration.

What we have said taken together with the suggestions of the diagram, besides illustrating the experiential process, *i.e.*, perception, also illustrates procedure according to the scientific method, which is indeed none other than the intelligently imaginative method as it is associated with scientific research. It is also the process of creativeness, which is, apart from technical ability, an imaginative perception intelligently transforming whatever facts are at the moment being registered. With so much of a person's interest, feeling, background, intelligence and imagination crowding together and mutually bearing upon perception, the character of the genuine experience as well as the expression of it is necessarily permeated with the personality of that individual. And this is precisely how universal qualities acquire, through the work of the artist in any field of human endeavor, an interesting individuality and novelty.

There are, however, negative and inhibiting factors also at work. Frequently, at the screening-out or censorship table, as it were, where our interest acts on the in-coming sensory reports (stimuli), the "clerks" that ordinarily serve this interest—*i.e.*, genuine, healthy, free curiosity or deep-grounded concern and feeling—either take leave of absence or else go to sleep, only to have their place filled by conceit, fixation, mental lethargy, laziness, narrow-mindedness, preconception, prejudice and routine or uncritical acceptance; thus, indifference, not interest, prevails, automatically accepting whatever fits its preconceptions, whatever finds an easy, familiar path. On repeated admittance of this material, the path deepens to a groove or rut, and our attention is then allowed to focus only on what flits effortlessly along this groove. For example, we have noted that perceptible and individual brushstrokes are a characteristic of Impressionist painting; hence, when our eye registers them in Renoir and Cézanne, we instantly conclude that these artists are, *ipso facto*, Impressionists, which upon further objective experience we would find they are not. Or, having seen bright color and distortion in Matisse, upon seeing it again in the paintings of children we say that no difference exists between the paintings of Matisse and those of children.

These are instances of arrested perception, arrested at its

threshold—that is, in the first stage of recognition. Interest has gone stale, has vanished; the bureau of intelligent censorship has folded up, and a habit-mechanism has usurped its place. While it is true that we see only what interests us, still, when we see nothing but what we have seen before, it is no longer interest guiding the selective process but a pair of blinders, immovably set like those leather flaps at the horse's headstall which prevent the horse from seeing beyond them to either side. And these "blinders" limit our perception by keeping our vision within a circumscribed range, hence denying to it whatever of novelty or difference may lie beyond. Inevitably, therefore, we develop blind spots, mental, psychological, emotional and, since our mind, our emotions and our physical body act as one, possibly even organic symptoms. People who automatically turn away from Matisse or Soutine or from modern art or the old masters, as the case may be, act not according to a genuine and free interest but according to what their "blinders" have constrained them not to see. Needless to say, the objective method cannot be limiting in this way.

But in gaining freedom we must not go careening on into license; an experience and its expression are significant only to the extent that imagination and emotion remain riveted on verifiable facts (as those of the teacher in the museum did not when she gazed at the Titian and reminisced about her grandfather) and that interest be not warped, artificially induced and deflected by emotionalism or sentimentality or idiosyncrasy or by the effects of alcohol or of certain drugs—the hallucinogenic agents, for example. Imagination and emotion when not strongly bridled by intelligence are apt to be runaway horses, pulling interest hither and thither, rushing nowhere except possibly into aberration. On the other hand, when intelligently controlled imagination and emotion are indispensable to creative work in any medium and in any field, in science as in the rest. In the artist they are, it is true, developed to a very high degree—are, in fact, among the essentials that constitute his creativeness and without which the most skilful technician cannot begin to be an artist.

In the essay which follows and subsequent essays to be

published in the *Journal*, this condition will be explored, how the artist's imaginative perception of our world is embodied in the thing he creates through selection, use and organization of materials intrinsic to his medium of expression and how what he thus communicates then serves in turn as a stimulus to the observer, its features striking his sense-organs and causing him to react, to act back at what acts on him in accordance with his interest, his background, his feelings, his intelligence and his imagination.

Esthetics of Literature

by ELLEN HOMSEY

I. INTRODUCTION

To arrive at an understanding of the esthetics of literature, we shall be principally concerned with the nature of words as they serve as the matter of literary art, how they come to acquire meanings that are dependent on the very policy of their usage, and what unique body of meanings they are capable of giving substance to.

To begin with what their nature is—we know at least about them without recourse to demonstration that words belong to the world outside ourselves. And, as may be said of everything that exists phenomenally, we know words, we come by them, through sensuous contact. It is equally self-evident that our understanding of the nature of all phenomena we meet is based necessarily on our way of apprehending it, that the sense through which it is perceived definitively qualifies its nature; thus, a sound, perceived as it is through the sense of hearing, is in its very mode of existence for us possessed of a meaning that inherently distinguishes it from colors or textures or tastes. And our senses each provide a specific, unique way of involving us in the outside world in which the very activity of “taking in” lends distinctive meaning to that portion of the world so apprehended. There is, in short, an irrevocable interdependence between the what and the how of perception.

In the arts which grow out of the various areas of sensuous contact—painting, music, etc.—the potential for esthetic richness depends ultimately on the intrinsic excitement and pleasure we derive from the process of being directly in touch with the world around us—that is, the activity of sensing—so that, for example, the particular meaning a painting can have for us lies in its ability to involve us directly in an experience of values belonging to visual perception.

Unlike the matter of the other arts, however, words—the matter of literature—do not belong to the domain of any

one sense. Such a sentence as that from a poem by Robert Burns, "O, my luve is like a red, red rose,/That's newly sprung in June" can come to us through sight, through hearing, and even through touch; apprehended by any of these senses, the sequence of words retains all that is essential for its special meaning as a descriptive comparison and carries the revelation of the same poetical values.

That words can, without change of meaning, be taken in by any of the senses (it is even conceivable that language could be built upon various scents or flavors) indicates that what they convey takes no substance from any immediate act of sensuous apprehension. Indeed, their relationship to the world we comprehend through our senses is familiar to nearly everyone; the word "rose," for instance, identifies, only because we have learned that it does, the sensations gathered from contact with a certain flower whether the flower is present or not. Such a word, we know, does not embody the object itself; "rose" heard or read no more stimulates our eye with color nor our nose with scent than the word "roastbeef" heard or read satisfies our appetite. Instead, the word simply attaches to or stirs a memory of something known in other terms, ordering the pieces of our experiences for us so that we can, for instance, ask for roastbeef and not be served a rose. This is to say that words refer to, or symbolize, reality as gathered by all modes of sensuous activity rather than *are* it.

While all consideration of words must begin with the recognition of their referential function and their corresponding failure to be what they denote, literature as an art assumes that they can possess significance transcending mere identification or their informational content—a significance that allows the word "rose," for example, to play an expressive part in the poem by Robert Burns that the thrusting forth of a rose of the senses at the appropriate moment in place of the word could in no way satisfy. Such significance depends on the power of words to involve us in an experience the meaning of which is at one with the act of perception, for it is only on those terms that words can genuinely serve as a medium of expression. How a symbol involves us in meaning different from the reality it lays claim to representing—

that is, how literature can involve us in meaning that entails an immediate experience of the words themselves—and what the character of this meaning is will be our concern throughout this essay.

II. THE EXPERIENCE OF THE WORD

The human mind is endowed with a deep and abiding memory of the impact on us of our active encounters with our environment—a memory that embodies all the specific meanings that come into being as the internal energy we each possess as living creatures, what we can broadly call interest, is brought into touch through our senses with the things and situations of the outside world. In so far as these memories encompass a sufficient wealth of the detail of any objective fact or situation, we may be said to have “learned” a reality; and, in so far as they include a sufficient investment of interest, we may also be said to “understand” it. The activity of interaction between our interests and “objective facts”—*i.e.*, our responses—gives rise to a body of reality that is neither the outside world nor us but partakes of both. That is to say, responses result in knowledge; they represent our transformation in terms of our own nature of the chaos of sensations initiated by the outside world into meaningful, coherent, bounded entities, ranging from the simplest, as red color, to the very complex, as an apprehension of cause-effect sequences, to the mystical, as religious and philosophical precepts. All of this knowledge, this body of responses, is henceforth a permanent, pervasive part of our existence and accessible, not just through sense stimulation, but through the whole complex of powers of our aliveness.

The nature of responses as they come to exist as the frame of reference for the identity of all we are and all we meet reflects the two-fold character of their generation. On the one hand, they encompass the distinguishing qualities of the things and situations our senses discover, qualities selected according to their relevance to our receptiveness and designative of meaning and identity through distinctions of both kind and degree; thus, for example, we know the outside world in terms of hardness or softness, warmth or coolness,

clarity, delicacy, massiveness, redness, etc. On the other hand, our responses consist of our interpretation of the value of the various qualities to us, that is, of the value of a particular manifestation of our interest as it acquires definitive, specific actuality by its attachment to an objective framework; we are charmed, moved, awed, repulsed, satisfied, and so on. It is by way of both these aspects of responsiveness—drawing out meanings from the objective attributes of the world and from our own human needs and interests—that the content of experience is derived.

As anything serves to revive such memories, to elicit a response, without duplicating the complex circumstances of an immediate sensuous experience, it is a symbol; and, correspondingly, when it loses touch with our background of responses, it is merely jargon or nonsense and not rightly a symbol at all, since nothing can be said to stand for something that virtually isn't. Because, however, it depends for its existence on the absence of directly precipitating sensuous contact, the symbol by its nature lays emphasis on the second aspect of responding, that which draws from us rather than that which draws from the material of the outside world; it activates an evaluation, interpretation, or comprehension rather than an immediate or strong impression of the wealth of qualities belonging to the things we sense. Thus, when we respond to the swastika with a spontaneous surge of anger and indignation or to the flag with a feeling of pride or veneration, we are, in effect, reliving a multiplicity of individual situations of infinite complexity now of a sudden distilled to the essence of our evaluation. All other symbols, though most of them are at least initially less dramatically potent than "flag" or "swastika," also play the same role. The word "roastbeef" can make the mouth water though the beef itself be not at hand. Our word "rose," in standing for a known object, has also the power to excite our accumulated responses to roses of our past, again less evocative of specific memories of their sweetness of smell or richness of color than of our own feelings of delight in their scent and the pleasure we took in their colorfulness—but for all that no less really real than those actual exchanges with the roses of the senses. Even numbers, which abstract the "pure"

concept of quantity from its unwieldy or impossible manifestation, depend for meaning on our having interpreted the countless episodes of finiteness in a special way.

Furthermore, we do not sit at rest with the revived response as objects of past sensing are alluded to. All of us are possessed by some degree of disquiet that compels us more or less to seek to "grasp this sorry scheme of things entire" and to "remold it nearer to the heart's desire," and so we act, as it were, back at, for instance, that watering at the mouth; and we recall not the tough, imperfect piece of roastbeef we ate last night, but a highly selective composite of those pieces which, in effect, most fully support or answer to the evaluation inherent in our present response. The numbers which stand in for quantities, too, reflect the absolute rationality of our perception rather than the one-by-one sequence in which amount occurs to the senses. Similarly, the rose of our sentence from Burns' poem is not the one from September's garden—brown-edged and wearing the tattered petals of too long a stay—but the rose of full-blown lushness or shy, budding, rain-washed sweetness—in short, the epitome of rose, whatever it has come to be for each of us in its most telling way, whether we knew it best by its scent, its color, its texture, or if it be that one we particularly noticed one quiet evening or the one which attracted our attention in the hot afternoon air. Thus, the symbol does not compete with the pleasure of smelling or seeing the rose; rather, it gives the mind possession of the most fully known of roses, a "rose-ness" distilled from all roses—the rose stripped of its individuality, its accidental relevance, and endowed with the essence of its most important meaning to us.

A symbol, since it can function in this way, possesses a further attribute which objects of sense do not. I cannot smell your rose of sense any more than I can nourish you by eating your roastbeef. What you can do, however, is to present me with a symbol "rose" which will elicit a response from me that contains a collection of my most telling experiences of roses. So long as we have both seen and smelled and touched roses, so long as we know, for all practical purposes, the same outside world, the use of this symbol can

give us a common, communicated awareness of the value the experience of a rose has.

Communication cannot, of course, take place without some commonly known material bridging the chasm our own individuality imposes on each of us. Thus, despite the emphasis a symbol gives to our own interpretive activity, the content of the outside world, shared by all of us through the senses, must be present in some quantity for the symbol to serve any meaningful function. We are aware of the importance of their referential content when we use words as everyday necessities or when we observe the precise, detailed, informational use science makes of language. The artist-writer, though not ultimately concerned with the informational or referential meaning of the word *per se*, because he is interested in communicating, is none the less equally dependent on the objective reality words embody for the genuine expressiveness and originality of what he wishes to convey. It is, indeed, as we shall see, an integral part of his art to keep their referential meanings fresh, vital, and specific, to maintain an interaction between us and the outside world, for symbols easily degenerate as they cease to feed on the substance from which they sprang. The propagandistic use of symbols, for instance, is usually calculated not to communicate meanings or to convey a unique, personal insight but to inspire blinding passions; and, accordingly, generalities, symbols that sweep across grand stretches of life, are played out to the full; a cloudy, variable, inconsistent body of experiences is alluded to, leaving each man to choose from his own storehouse that which most precipitously impels him toward the value judgement the propagandist may play upon for purposes quite distinct from the content of feeling. The character of the energy incited is excessive, unintelligent, emotive in its manifestation, not a response in any real sense because it makes only a one-way, detachable use of the objectively real.

III. THE REALM OF THE IMAGINATION

When we look for the art in any presentation of a person's perceptions of the meaning of an aspect of reality, we need to

be concerned with the fittingness of the medium of expression, the terms used, to what is being told, for it is only when they do fit that the elements by which expression is given body are made to be the direct stuff of an experience. If, for example, I attempt to set down a musical idea by painting a picture, though you may invent some idea of my meaning by which you think to understand it, the actual effect of the relationships of sounds never can assume the real body of a musical idea, and you cannot know the idea as it can really be known, *i.e.*, as music heard.

Our overall question reaches for an understanding of the art in literature, that is, in how literature serves in its own terms to involve us in experiences unique to an aspect of actuality it alone informs of and by way of which we can heighten and enrich our understanding of and the pleasure we take in everyday life. Although we will soon look more specifically at the way a writer uses words to achieve his expressive, creative end, we need first to establish what the domain of the writer consists of, what form of actuality it is that serves as the exclusive content for a "literary experience."

Each of the arts explores an aspect of what is real and the values intrinsic to that reality by quite literally *realizing* it: in music, the putting together of a mass and sequence of sounds offers us an auditory experience of those sounds; in painting, as we noted earlier, the concern is with the values belonging to visual experience, and the product, capable of being taken in by the observer only through his eyes, inherently provides for a visual experience of the organization of the means by which the world is seen—color, light, line, space, and volume.

But what seems clear about the media of arts belonging to compartmental senses is not so immediately self-evident about literature. Of the means of literature we have already observed that they do not belong to any given sense; as a result, we do not (without the intervention of our past) intuitively *know* what words are as we know, for example, what the color red or the sound b flat is. So that we cannot say that literature, the organization of words, offers us, as the other arts do, a primary experience of the outside world.

Thus far we have seen that a word such as our rose is referential to the rose of sense but does not share in its wealth of attributes; we know that the word shares with its counterpart from the garden the power to awaken memory of the accumulated responses we have given to roses of the past; and we know that, in the case of the word, because of the absence of the physical attributes of sensed roses, we are encouraged to perceive the rose in terms of its roseness rather than in the complexities of its detail. This emphasis on the part we play in the meaning a symbol embodies indicates that words, though they are "indirect," representational of sensed reality, do directly offer us an experience of that body of qualities saturated by our evaluation or interpretation which constitutes our responses. We can call a work of literature, then, an experience of the imagination in very much the same sense that we refer to a visual experience when speaking of painting; for the symbol itself is the exclusive means by which these responses assume an undistracted external form.

In the case of our single word, however, we are still concerned primarily with our response to the things of the outside world; the roseness captured by the symbol belongs more to the roses of sense than to the word itself. And we need once more to go back to our rose to see how words may be made to serve the imaginative purposes of literature, to give rise to realities not accessible to us through any other means. The spontaneous evidence of response revived by an isolated use of the word "rose" consists fairly simply of the re-enactment of a fleeting sense impression, much like the most minute of dreams, accompanied by the merest hint of imaginative idealization. Well, say the textbooks, we have re-experienced the thing itself, however nebulously, by way of a substitute or symbol; we have had a vicarious experience. And they are essentially accurate, for this word rose certainly depends for everything it gives us knowledge of on the nature of our contact with garden roses. Thus, proceed the books, literature, which is made up of such words, is the natural provider of vicarious experience. The implication of such a theory is, of course, that we can have our rose without getting our fingers pricked; or for those

who think the world is made for melancholy, that we are allowed only to anticipate the roastbeef without hope of satisfaction of our appetites. Under the guise of vicarious experience, literature emerges as a pale and meager rendition of reality—a rendition consisting of the shadow cast by the things of the world rather than their substance, a reality devoid of the stuff with which to modify our past and to enlarge our present. For, stripped of attributes, the word stands simply for past responses, while the thing itself—the real rose—uses past experiences to enhance our response to its presence. Indeed, if vicarious experience were the aim of literature, a botany text book which gives us the thousand words proverbially equivalent to the seen rose would rank among our most honored works of art, and the master critic of literature would certainly be the author of that little doggerel: “I think that I shall never see/ A poem as lovely as a tree.”

This attitude towards literature is given at such length because it exemplifies so directly what literature is *not*. And yet it is an attitude that arises naturally, and has been held with respect, because words draw their meaning from our contact with reality; that is, they are initially descriptive. However, to liken the meaning of literature to the meaning an isolated word has for us is no less inaccurate than likening water to one of its elements or a painting to one of its means. A word is a means; it alone has only the *potential* to be used to give a full imaginative experience.

Let us then go back to our poem to see whether such things as words can give us something “as lovely as a tree.” The rose we plucked from it does little more than jog our memories. What more, then, does Burns do with his means? At first glance, we find a *red* rose; to the initial symbol rose he adds a word which draws a little bit more from the phenomenal world, thus calling upon a more specific, and therefore more compelling, memory of response. Yet, the symbols are still vicarious in their impact, still imitative of a nature better equipped to give us what the words embody. At second glance, however, we find our rose to be not simply a red rose, but a “red, red rose.” The author has added a word that, though it is exactly the same as the first “red,” forms an

entity that can no longer be verified by the sensuous facts we know. With this additional red, the rose of symbol casts off its subservience to the rose of sense and emerges exclusively as a product of language; for neither the garden nor a painting possesses the "red, red rose"; that is the invention of the poet. Painting and nature can at best provide red roses which (turning the tables) symbolize these words. And in so outgrowing the garden or the painting our rose is no longer simply a substitute for reality but an entity made of attributes that derive from the realm of imagination.

Burns, in no longer drawing upon nature for the rose he presents, in asking for no more specific response to real roses than that which we have accumulated to the general category of red ones, is, thus, using words to give body to a product which partakes of the unique, positive character we have seen words themselves to possess; that is, he has created from his interaction with the outside world an entity that depends for its existence on his interpretive powers, and only secondarily and incidentally on the qualities by which phenomenal reality acquires its identity. And words so used convey meanings that exist first of all within the ideational, the imaginative, the conceptual world—a world made up of our own activity of perception rather than of the *what* of perception and, thus, a world in which we can transcend the boundaries of sense to a comprehension of qualities, of meanings, that have to do with our very process of experiencing what we encounter.

If the second "red" does not give us more information about sensed roses, on what basis would we choose from the garden or painting a rose to symbolize this symbol? What, in other words, is the value to us of this entity Burns has evolved? The garden or painted rose might be chosen for its flamboyance or its blowsiness, for the intensity of its color, for its light delicacy (suggested perhaps by the light skipping rhythm of "red, red" or the general lilting rhythm of the entire line) or any number of other possible characteristics, none of which is necessarily less or more right than the others and all of which share this feature of likeness—that we identify "red, redness" with an understood, a thoroughly comprehended, agreed-upon quality. Qualities, then, be-

long not just to the world of sense but may also come to be embedded in or to be drawn out of our imaginative perceptions. And, further, we can see that the value of the reality words give birth to is no less potent than that of sensed phenomena; for, just as our "red, red rose" borrows from the garden rose our sensuous knowledge of both roses and red, so in our finding of a garden-grown symbol for the phrase, it can bestow its own unique meaning back on the world of the senses.

The realization of qualitative entities which do not belong *a priori* to sense experience is the basis on which language enriches our understanding of and the pleasure we take in everyday life. Henceforth, we may always be able to find among our variety of garden roses that special "red, red" one, though it never could have grown there before Burns pointed it out to us. It must be remembered, however, that the entities thus discovered always stem from our contact with the outside world; red, red roses could not blossom in our imaginations under a colorless light. And though we may seem to abandon the usual realities the world offers us, they are relinquished only in those features which distract from the conception revealed. The nature of rose as embodied in the symbol is just that set of specifics from the real world it needs in order to support the red redness; its multitude of petals, its distinct outline, the particular character of its texture at the moment are not essential to the red redness our poet discovered, and if they were to become so he would have to find words to give them to us, too.

As we noted at the beginning, language, unlike painting which talks with only visual attributes, unlike music, unlike architecture, etc., is accessible to us through any and all of the senses without modification or deprivation of meaning. And, accordingly, it is capable of gathering quite indiscriminately attributes in the form of symbols from the material of all the senses and of redistributing them in combinations that ignore the boundaries imposed by the compartmental nature of sense experience that the corresponding art forms must by nature adhere to. We have initially nowhere but in language sweet melodies, heavy color, undulating landscapes, velvet tones, and so forth, though once language has

provided them, they become accessible to all our means of perception; in a similar manner, we as yet have nowhere but in language such scientific projections as DNA or viruses, though the results of their existence are sensed and dealt with accordingly. And like our red, red rose, which more subtly transcends the barriers of sense experience, these imaginative ideas or perceptions give us a grasp of a unique aspect of the stuff of life, give us the means to make the stuff of disparate experience comprehensible in terms of ideas which capture and thus reveal the commonality of the eye and ear, which correlate and distil the implicit meanings of and from our human contact with the outside world, which provide us ingress into degrees intolerable to or too subtle for sense experience, so that we have not just words that identify, such as "rose," but words which summarize, generalize, abstract, qualify, create—words, in short, which represent our own interpretive perceptiveness of the reality we meet. And thus language both provides a way to expand the range of meanings physical reality can have for us and gives us a concrete comprehension of the great mass of compartmental attributes, gives us, that is, a sense of the unity within the segmented experiences of life which, without words to capture and transmit it, could at best be caught in a fleeting intuition, difficult to retain and impossible to communicate.

IV. PLEASURES OF THE IMAGINATION

In our attempt to arrive at an understanding of the esthetics of literature, we have tried to demonstrate that words, though symbols of sensed reality, offer us not another, or arbitrary, way of seeing old familiar reality, but a vision of an otherwise inaccessible and unique aspect of it. Discovering that "red, red rose" presents us with a qualitative entity of the imagination as real as the qualities visually offered by the garden rose represents part of the journey along the way to arriving at what literature is about. For, just as painting is directed towards providing us with an experience of the visual aspect of our world in terms of values belonging to our perceiving of it, so literature provides us with the imaginative as that represents our interpretive responsive-

ness or conceptualization. In our discussion of the red, red rose of our poem, we began to see what this imaginative aspect consists of; we found, in this short phrase, a quality emerging, yes, from our knowledge of sensed roses and sensed redness; but knowledge generalized and the experience of the senses recalled for our evaluation of its meaning rather than for its objective attributes.

In having the substance in which we can discover an imaginative meaning, the phrase "red, red rose" also exemplifies the general character of the experience which literature provides us with—namely, an experience of conceptualization. Any use of words, indeed, which does not successfully limit itself to imitating the nature displayed to our senses, evokes in us a concept, or an imaginative grasp, of a reality imbued with our own responsiveness or interpretive, rational, and emotional powers. For neither the word "rose" nor the phrase "red, red rose," as words with familiar meaning, can be used by us nor be taken in by us without at least a spontaneous awareness on our part of an idea embodied by them. To illustrate further, in one of the *Dialogues* by Plato Socrates is portrayed as proving that all knowledge is inherent to the circumstance of humanity by drawing from an uneducated slave boy, through a series of carefully worded questions, the proof of the Pythagorean theorem; the slave boy, of course, had never heard of Pythagoras or his theorem, much less of any proof of it. Nevertheless, by his own answers, in the making of which he was skillfully led by the master, the boy did in fact discover himself to be fully cognizant of the proof. Without arguing about what Socrates was actually attempting to show or was successful in showing, we can see from this example that words themselves, once we have learned to use them, allow us to comprehend, specifically and instrumentally, what the potentially finest mind would be practically incapable of coming to an awareness of, even momentarily, without words to serve as its concrete, permanent body.

From this we shall begin to deal with what the esthetics of literature is built upon. If in order to understand the esthetics of painting we need to understand the *a priori* appeal of the attributes of the visual world—the source of the

specific values embodied in works of art (such as the pleasing quality of an arabesque line)—or of music, the appeal of the attributes of the auditory aspect of reality, similarly with literature we need to understand the appeal for us in what the imaginative world is made up of. We have observed that it entails conception rather than sensation. And to carry the parallel out, we do discover that as color in the visual world is found to give us the pleasure of stimulating our sense, so a word can be found to give us pleasure through its ability to stimulate our minds to comprehension, to animate us to an awareness of imaginative entities. The word gives us possession of the idea it embodies—that is, we as surely create with our imaginative responsiveness to words something real and engaging and meaningful as the reality we meet and perceive through our senses. And this possession of an idea, a grasp of meaning, is satisfying for its own sake. All of us can lay claim to any number of such experiences of the satisfaction or pleasure that realizing through words provides. Who has not at some time, for instance, been steeped in the satisfaction afforded by the apt phrase, the few well chosen words, enclosing or comprehending some occurrence of disparate or complex components—an occurrence we already knew in its direct manifestation, but now known anew, differently, with a unique insight, a particular sense of understanding it, as we regard it from the point of view that the apt phrase opens the way to. Or, again, who has not sighed with pleasure when the evasive name of a well-known face suddenly slips off the tongue, that is, when a person known so well as he appears before us is comprehended in the special way his name, the symbol for him, provides. In this event, not only is he happily “placed” by his symbol within our frame of reference, but he seems also to gather attributes and associations tied to it, to be made comprehensible by it far beyond the mere incident of recognition its application entails.

These examples illustrate how the comprehension stimulated by words, or embodied in them, is satisfying to us for its own sake; the name does not add anything to, or change in any way, the known person, nor does the apt phrase affect the known course of events. The pleasure or satisfaction in

each case rests, rather, solely in the imaginative grasp we have experienced of some feature of the world, a grasp which arises exclusively out of the actual character of the words as we command them, that belongs to them in the same way that numbers grasp the essence of quantity and thereby give rise to an inexhaustible universe of possible meaning. And in that pleasure or satisfaction we take in comprehension for its own sake, which describes simply what the esthetic consists of, lies the basis for the esthetic potential of literature.

V. RELATIONSHIPS AND MEANING

In each of the arts the enrichment of life offered comes to us by way of a complete and complex experience of an aspect of reality. We demand if we are to find a presentation satisfying that the whole grow out of the parts that make it up and that what it gives to the experiences of other aspects of reality come by way of analogy rather than by the necessity to complete an unresolved or unsubstantiated idea. If we always had to go back and count a group of apples to reassure ourselves of the meaning of the number five, we should never achieve an independent body of knowledge called mathematics. And, while our phrase "red, red rose" gives us awareness of a quality not perceivable another way and provides us with an esthetic experience in our comprehension of this quality, it soon sends us back to the world of sense for substantiation, for it realizes an idea which embellishes only the visual world and not, as it stands alone, the conceptual one. Qualities, like salt, must flavor something to be of significance; the rose of symbol by itself does not possess enough to give sufficient substantiation to the qualifying red redness to realize it in a full, self-sufficient way, and we must turn to another aspect of reality, for instance, back to the garden rose, to enjoy the meaning the phrase discovers. In contrast to this, the garden rose, with its wealth of specific complexity, its one-piece containment of a great variety of attributes, is self-sufficient and leads us to other things or situations only through analogy; though, that is, it may suggest a sense of the freshness of spring or the languid heaviness of summer, though, in other words, it alludes to something

that is not an inherent part of it, this allusion grows out of an easy association rather than out of a need to explain or to complete the garden rose. To complete his symbolic rose, our poet if he is to be a poet must, of course, substantiate it with other words. It is the means by which he can accomplish this that we shall next consider.

We are all constantly engaged in giving substance to, giving meaning to, what we encounter in everyday life. Such activity, indeed, is inseparably bound up with our being human—with our efforts to satisfy our needs and with our seeking to exercise our intellectual and emotional capacities. And as such, the activity of giving meaning is purposeful. We identify and define new things we meet in order to understand our world; the traffic coming down the street takes on a specific meaning if we wish to cross, another if we are waiting for a lift from a friend. In these cases, and in all instances of our encounters with the world, the meaning of situations and objects is dependent on the way in which they affect our specific interests or needs, how they relate to these interests and needs.

The word "relate" is the one which pinpoints the process whereby meaning is bestowed; in it lies the principle by which the poet gives meaning to our "red, red rose" with other words, as well as the principle by which meaning is given to the things of everyday life.

In daily conversation we speak of relationships in a number of different ways: we refer to our relatives; we talk of related fields of study; we remark on relationships existing between people; we even relate stories. In each of these usages, we can see the beginning of the process or activity of relating—namely, our recognition of a common element among different things: other people and I have the same ancestors and are, therefore, related; sociology and psychology both consider such factors as man's motivation; two people have a common bond of feeling between them; and in relating a story, I am sharing with you an experience of words.

We can see, too, from each instance described that the common features of different things are acted upon by each other, an action apparent in the emergence of an entity

separate from, though dependent on, the elements which contribute the special part of themselves: the family is the entity to which the possession of ancestors in common gives birth; the category of the humanities emerges from the common stuff of psychology and sociology; love or friendship results from the commonly held feelings; a narrative is created by my sharing the words with you.

By this formation of the new entity, meanings begin to accrue to the elements which make it up, for they are now part of some new whole as well as things in themselves: I am no longer just me with all my facts but also a member of a family; sociology is not only a specific field of study but also one of the humanities; and so on.

Meanings are further given to the parts in a relationship by their individual differences; thus, in spite of the old song that asserted a contrary proposition, I am not "my own grandma" or cousin, but someone else's cousin because my parents are different in a specific way from theirs. The individuality of the parts also acts to qualify the whole in an analogous way; the family, for instance, may be a great, sprawling clan because it contains cousins thrice-removed, a superabundance of aunts and uncles and grandchildren, or it might be a small, close threesome of a mother, father, and only child.

The general description of the commonality and interactiveness of relationships shows the overall way in which meanings accrue to the related elements. In the examples from everyday life, we have seen the emergence of categories from relationships. The artist's primary interest, however, is in the presentation of an experiential entity rather than a categorical one; in this there is a corresponding difference in the nature of the meanings which gather in the elements, for in an experience we play a more active role than one of mere recognition; and thus, instead of acquiring only new facts, the elements we perceive acquire new qualities. Let us, then, look at an example of relationship resulting in an experience rather than a category.

Suppose a glass of water sitting on the table in front of us. We'll assume that none of us is thirsty and that we so anxiously await the development of this example that we

hardly notice the water. At best, then, it represents the chemical fact of H_2O in some given quantity. If, on the other hand, one of us were thirsty or bored (bringing an interest to bear on the fact), we might begin to see in the water possibilities for alleviating our thirst or boredom; we recognize in the water and thirst or boredom a common denominator which past experience has taught us. We may then go on to relate them—to drink the water or study the way in which it reflects and refracts light. In thus allowing the thirst and water to interact according to certain potentials, we, too, have interacted with the elements, and we find that an experience results—in this case, an experience of satisfied need; thirst is quenched, boredom assuaged.

In making an experiential rather than categorical entity of these elements, we have added not specific facts or attributes—such as cousinhood—to their individual meanings but qualities. For, an experience that comes as the result of any relationship is itself necessarily qualitative in the nature of the satisfaction it provides to our interest. Thus, by way of the result, the interaction, the relationship, the water, in addition to being H_2O , is also pleasantly cool, or it distorts things interestingly. Similarly, thirst and boredom, in themselves unpleasant or annoying sensations, absorb value from the instrumental part they play in the satisfaction we derive.

In the preceding example, we saw a relationship resulting in an experience which was complex (made up of more than one element), unified (the elements were interdependent for their meanings in the relationship), and complete (the experience resulting from the relationship was satisfying in itself). What we have done with the water and thirst or water and boredom is not essentially different from what the author of our line of poetry does with his red, red rose and the other words he uses. Where he does differ, where all artists differ from people involved in everyday experiences, is in his specific interest in establishing relationships between, in drawing meanings from, the stuff of his chosen field for the purpose of enriching the world of meanings with his unique insight and of giving us an experience of those meanings. In effect, he remolds the world closer to the

heart's desire; that is, he endows it with his own qualitative meaning.

At first glance, it is perhaps difficult to see on exactly what basis of commonality a literary artist can bring the matter of his medium into relationship. There are none of the natural boundaries provided by the arts which belong to the compartments of sense. In painting, the different colors with which the basic relationships are built have quite directly in common their colorfulness; in music, the same thing is true of sound, and so, too, of the space-volume of architecture and the body-motion of dance. Words, however, not only are capable of referring to such sensuously separate phenomena as sound and color, but encompass a far more disparate range of meanings; they rove from objects to qualities to actions and among abstract concepts and names. In our simple line of poetry we find a wealth of disjunctive words: "O, my luve is like a red, red rose, / That's newly sprung in June." What has the poet put together? "Is" symbolizes something inaccessible to sense experience—not an object or sound or taste, but a fact or state of existence recognized by intellectual means; "O" refers to something belonging neither to the intellect nor to sense, but stands as a message that the poet exists, with its meaning suspended until something else has been said; "like" involves notions of judgement or interpretation that stem from our techniques of perceiving; "luve" refers to a person whose identity is made by the emotions of the poet; "red, red rose" stands for an object from the outside world, though put together this way, as we have seen, going beyond the actual evidence of the senses; "newly sprung" represents an expenditure of energy; "June" is a conventional label for a specified and peculiar time span. In short, the range of reference to which words have access is no more limited than the means by which we can come by them, including every potential of our reason, emotion, our entire activity of personality and perception.

We have had a clue to the commonality among words in our previous discussions of how words are meaningful to us, namely, that they provide us with an experience of an imaginative grasp of reality. We can perhaps now understand this in a fuller way. For language itself is the result



NUDE—PEN AND INK DRAWING

IRVIN NAHAN

of a relationship, specifically one between ourselves and the outside world. The word *rose*, you remember, is made up of both roses of the real world and our responses to them; as these components interact, they bestow qualities on each other—the rose takes on softness or colorfulness, our responsiveness becomes embodied in a memory of sensation. The result of this interaction or relationship is the experience of an idea which we know as the word. And however far away a word may seem to move from its source in the world around us, no word that conveys any meaning is totally devoid of a sensory component, and none fails to encompass the activity of our relationship to some aspect of the world around us.

Now we should have no difficulty in seeing on what basis words are always capable of being related. For, while they may or may not be related on the basis of their phenomenal meaning (as *rose* is with *lilac* but not with *June*), they all absolutely possess in common the feature of their ideational character—a feature as operational for literature as color is for painting.

Each poet determines his own policy for developing the material at his disposal according to the interests to which he wishes to give substance. A brief glance at our line has already discovered a series of words which skip over a hodge-podge array of different kinds of reality: “my love” isn’t compared to my best friend; the “red, red rose” isn’t coupled with purple lilacs; “newly sprung” isn’t perpetuated by leaps and bounds; “June” doesn’t succeed May. Such might have been one or another of the cases had the poet wished to probe into the expressive potential of his material by embedding his insight in a more full-bodied context of actuality. Instead, Burns chose words that acknowledge actualities which, at best, bear only an incidental connection to each other in the world of the senses but which, because of this, take on a novelty of association. Such novelty, however, may be instrumental to any number of meanings; it may, for instance, be made striking, sharp, jarring, bizarre or suggestive of mysteries, strange, exotic, depending on how these differences are used as well as on what each varying element contains as a distinct unit. In the case of our poet,

the novelty is tempered, played out for what it can impart of a freshness and a gentle, sparkling vitality in support of his poetical idea; here, for all their differences, each word very much shares in a common store of human value—the value we bestow as we respond to the qualities the words embody. “June,” “newly sprung,” “my luve,” our “red, red rose” are all alike in belonging to the area of human meaning containing the pleasant, mild, cheerful, delightful, simple, charming—values to which, in turn, the specific reality of each word lends a special insight. Burns might, instead, have dealt with unlike values, for instance, have given us December with “June.” We saw such a relationship in action earlier between water and thirst; there, the unlikeness provided an element of drama through which both the meaning of the qualities of coolness and wetness and the nature of the satisfaction derived from these qualities achieved a special intensity. But in our line such drama plays no part; the likeness of value is, indeed, emphasized, drawn out, by the very scantiness of detail, the mere smile-in-passing attention paid to referential content, so that each word is pressed to gather the most of its flavor and substance from the others, yet, again because of the likeness referred to, with an ease and naturalness which itself becomes a qualifying aspect of the particular ideational episode our line unfolds. Thus, our sweet “rose,” which begins as the faintest sketch of a reality, is gently infused with the colorful substance of a “red, red” hue, itself possessed of a general richness rather than the sharper specificity of maroon or scarlet or cadmium; it goes on to absorb the balmy warmth of “June” and the fresh vitality of “newly sprung”; and the pale, shadowy “my luve,” by way of a “like” that delicately bridges all deeper issues of difference, brushes the red redness of that glowing, animated rose into her own imaginary cheek and fills herself out with all the color and warmth and life she could need. She is not explored for her personal depth, for the eccentricities or charms of her character, for how she would respond to this or that event, or how she feels about anyone on the earth. The poet gives her to us through his own eyes, which have looked to see what is graceful and gay and decorative, conveying these qualities completely in the terms of his medium.

The absorption by the "rose" of qualities from "June" and "newly sprung" and its bestowal of the warmth, freshness, redness on the unnamed "luve" result from such relationship as we have seen the symbolic nature of words to make possible. These particular exchanges of meaning do not take place in the phenomenal world, but in the regions of reality that words alone disclose. And, by being a part of the whole of the poetic experience, the "red, red rose" no longer needs nor makes use of the garden for the substance it possesses, for it gathers such meanings from its context that never were in any garden and only are because the poet grasped some piece of "this sorry scheme of things entire" and let it go again remolded in his "heart's desire." Yet, because it is also embedded in what we know, our new "red, red rose" also enriches the outside world for us, so that the roses, the Junes, the springing motions of the senses may all possess the gaiety, the simplicity, the charm our poet showed us through his medium of words.

VI. QUALITIES AND SYMBOLS

We have begun to look at how symbols gather meaning from their context, from their relationship with other symbols. The rose of our example was seen to absorb qualities from "June" and "newly sprung" and, in turn, to give these newly acquired attributes, along with its own roseness, to the "luve" of the poem. And the line itself, in evolving this enriched "luve" gave us also the experience of the very interaction between the symbols. We noticed earlier that the water of one of our examples took on certain values or qualities drawn from it by the part it played in providing us with an experience of satisfied thirst, that the thirst also took on value according to the satisfaction. That is, these values belonged to the character of our satisfaction in experiencing the relationship between thirst and water. The values we saw were the coolness and the wetness of the water which the thirst served to heighten. Similarly, in our poem it was the warmth of June that the "red, red rose" gathered in as a result of the poetical relationship, the sweetness of the rose that gave substance to "my luve." Warmth, sweetness,

coolness, wetness—all these we identify as aspects of sensation. And, indeed, no matter where we look for qualities, no matter what object we discover them in, we always find them in sensation—at the ends of our fingertips, through our noses, on our tongues, in our ears and eyes. In short, all qualities have their origins in sensuous contact with the outside world, for qualities by their nature emerge as the result of our interaction with, our relationship to, objective reality. They embody the meanings such interaction has: thus, it is the coolness and wetness of the water that we find satisfying, that gives the water meaning, though our bodies are really asking simply for the chemical substance of H_2O ; it is the hardness we touch that gives us the knowledge that this table will resist our hand's pressure, though the cause of this resistance lies in a physical law of molecular structure; we know the chair through its stability, though the law of gravity and principles of structure govern that, too.

The realization of qualities in the terms of a medium of expression by which they become accessible to experience is the special concern of art. But, if the qualities all have their origins in our sensuous contacts, how come symbols to possess them for us in a real and powerful and enriching way? Surely no one can claim that the warmth of the symbol "June" is felt as the warmth of the sun on the skin or the warmth of a sunny color. The idea contained by the word "June" gives us an imaginative grasp of warmth we have known in the past; but wherein does this understanding of the quality through an ideational reality have specific meaning for its very warmth? How, that is, does the word—and, correspondingly, the poem—become meaningful in terms of the quality of warmth drawn from it by its relationship to "love," "newly sprung" and "red, red rose" without the senses themselves being stimulated or satisfied?

In order to answer these questions, we might perhaps look again at the nature of the symbol. Language is the particular mode of symbolizing we shall ultimately be concerned with, but language is not an isolated invention of mankind. Rather, it is only the most highly refined and complex mode of symbolizing within a vastly inclusive category of what we can recognize as expressive behavior.

That language is behavior is implicit in our finding that it embodies comprehension and that it is communicative. Behavior is meant, in this instance, to include all human activity in which meaning is recognizable. To clarify the implications of viewing language as behavior we might do well to begin with a simpler manifestation of it. And what could be simpler for our purposes than a smile? A smile answers to all the criteria for behavior, and so does it also to those for a symbol in the tradition of language. When someone smiles at us we cannot feel it as we feel the coolness of the water or the warmth of the sun. What it expresses is not to be discovered in the specific organization of the substance of our visual experience of it—color, light, line, etc.—as these features convey a painter's meaning, for instance. Instead, its meaning is reflective and communicative; it stands for something—a feeling, a state of being, an attitude of mood or mind—that it, in fact, is not. And we respond to the smile just as we saw that we responded to the word "rose"; in effect, we smile back.

In our responsive re-creation of the smile, we undergo a sensuous experience which gives us a direct taste of its meaning, just as the word "rose" gave us a fleeting, dreamlike impression of its scent and color. We smile back, if not literally—as a baby will do with all the open joy a smile may represent—then in the content of our feeling. This re-enactment is, in essence, the imaginative equivalent of a sense impression and allows us to reach through the representative aspect of the symbol to catch hold of qualities in the form of the values implicit in those evoked "feelings." So that it is our imaginative grasp of the smile as the feeling it represents is re-created in us, or of the rose as we intuitively grasp its roseness, that gathers to itself these values and objectifies them as surely and clearly as the table objectifies the quality of hardness by which we know it.

The difference between our responsiveness to symbols and to sensed reality, then, lies in the stuff by which the qualities or values are objectified. With sensed reality, the qualities which give us knowledge of it belong, for all practical purposes, to what is outside us; they are realized by our bringing to bear on the outside world our capacity to re-

spond—our needs, interests, feelings, motives; and so we do know water by the coolness which satisfied us and a table by its impenetrability. And thus does the outside world have meaning for us.

But what world do we know through the values belonging to symbolic reality? All we know of it, as we have just seen of sensed reality, is, in fact, only those qualities which belong to it; for they have become embedded in those very motives, interests, psychological needs, those remote and obscure aspects of the self that lie behind thinking and sensing—the aspects inaccessible to thinking and sensing and feeling because they determine that thinking, feeling, sensing take place in the way they do, indeed, that they take place at all. The gentleness, the pleasure, we derived from our brief sensing of the smile becomes the only meaning by which we directly, intuitively understand that permeating “feeling.” Sweetness becomes the meaning of that comprehension of, that sense of becoming one with, the rose.

It is, in short, by behavior, and the particularly acute form of behavior language represents, that our responsiveness to the world around us is translated into terms which involve our own identity. Symbols serve as one of the instruments of behavior through which we assume a reality, through which we define our own impulses and energies in concrete, objective, knowable terms. For, as the qualities found in the things of the outside world make them accessible in specific ways to our reflection and our appreciation, so those which attach to the energy of our deep psychological yearnings and motives lend us knowledge of and insights into the world of our subjective selves.

And in our line of poetry, how do we find these qualities serving to give us an experience of themselves in the peculiarities of verbal symbols? If it were not language with which our poet chose to behave, he might have used a sweet, bright smile for the “rose,” a gentle, warm caress for “June,” a gay, melodious burst of song for “red, red,” a fresh sprig of laughter for “newly sprung”—all invested in, all giving a special life and meaning to, the “luve” of his choice. But he could not have led us to the regions of discovery to which language can carry us; for language adds something special

to these activities which draw our subjective energies into our ken; it endows the qualities thus embodied with the richness of exclusive meaning to which only the infinite precision and scope of language, with its vast capacity to explore all regions of relationships and phenomena, has access. With words we are at liberty to range at large among all possibilities of things and situations, to inhabit provinces found solely through our interpretive powers, because words objectify our interests in the specific terms of the outside world—that is, they put them on a basis accessible to our means of understanding. So can we shape that unspecified force which underlies what we are into an objective identity that allows for such shades and varieties of meaning to accrue to our own definition that our discoveries and insights are potentially limitless.

VII. TRANSFERRED VALUES

We have been concerned with how qualities, drawn as they are from our contact with things of the world, serve the end of a literary, a symbolic, presentation. We saw that qualities partake of both phenomenal reality and our inherent responsiveness, and that, just as they serve the end of the sensuous arts by giving real things a meaningful identity, so they serve the end of symbolic art by giving substance to, giving an objective meaning to, our inner motives, our responsiveness.

We also saw that this substantiation of our inner selves in terms of qualities provides for an esthetic experience as real as that given by the drink of water in our earlier example. In each case, that of the symbol and that of an object, the qualities which determine meaning are equivalent to esthetic values. But, while these esthetic values are permanently a part of things (the glass of water always has a degree of coolness), they belong to symbols only transiently; they must be made and made again and then re-made. This is a natural condition of their dependency on our own behavioral relationships with the world around us. And, just as a raised eyebrow, the first time exquisitely expressive, becomes through repetition a meaningless gesture or a mere mannerism, so

words forfeit their power to stir our imagination as their newness wears off. Our "rose" is no more immune from this disintegration of value than any other word. Let it appear as "a rose is a rose is a rose" and see how as a symbol it sheds its petals, it forsakes the garden in which it grew, it relinquishes its very flowerness—all those attributes to which we attach our responsiveness—in the same way that a number would lose its precise meaning were it made to stand for quantities at random. We saw it, knew it, three times, not a rose three times eloquently rosy but thrice diminished in its roseness, as a multiple mirror diminishes an image to the point of vanishing. We are left, yes, with a philosophical comment, yes, with an idea of an idea, but not with an experience of discovered qualities. "A pot is a pot is a pot" says as much in terms of the meaning sought and achieved, regardless of whether we like the sound as well or prefer one object used to the other.

The artist who uses language as an art is necessarily concerned with keeping his symbols full, fresh, alive, and communicative of the meanings he wishes to convey, with offering us access to qualities that lend appeal and significance to the situations of daily life, with providing, in short, the specific material for the drawing out of our responsiveness. For this he has at his disposal an infinite variety of techniques and matter. We have looked at a rose invested with freshness in a sentence "O, my luve is like a red, red rose, / That's newly sprung in June"—a rose more than thrice enriched in its roseness as qualities are realized and developed by the lending and borrowing renewal the context provides. Burns chose certain words with certain sounds, meanings, and evocative powers; he put them into an order and a rhythmic pattern that emphasizes this or that meaning, shade, quality and that adds something to the meaning of the sequence by its own dancing meter; he lightly brushes a multiplicity of quick images against each other in a kind of relationship which partakes of the gay, simple charm that characterized his poetical idea.

Perhaps, however, one might argue that Burns' rose is only grander, more complex, than the one exhausted by Gertrude Stein and that Burns' rose would as readily de-

generate to mannerism as that thrice-told rose were it repeated proportionally to its greater complexity. Yet this, we know, is not so; many a poem can delight us time after time, and, rather than fading, in fact it grows the richer, though what it may have to say is of the simplest import, as we meet it again and again. To see why, we may remember that our rose has been made "grander" and "more complex" not by being subjected to mere elaboration but by actively playing a part in a relationship built upon the qualities of greatly varying symbols.

In the fact of their playing a part in a relationship do we find the source of the perpetual freshness of symbols. First of all, it comes from the activity of relating itself, an activity of change and exchange—change, like iridescence, in which the elements move between stepping forward in their individual meanings and joining forces to generate new entities and a new whole, all this with a pulsating excitement reminiscent of the multiple rhythms of life. Thus, the activity of relationships is an enlivening, animating force that lays the groundwork for the perpetual newness of the symbols involved in them because change itself is a condition of freshness and newness.

Secondly, we, by our own perceiving, and the behavioral involvement symbols directly entail, are also engaged in the on-going process of change; we enter into the relationship, contributing not only our understanding, as we have seen, but also a background of experiences, one or more of which may be revived by some common feature between the new and the old. And when this common feature lies in the qualitative aspect of those experiences, we transfer the values, with all the suggestive richness of their specific content, from one to the other. Thus may the coolness that we learned as belonging to the satisfaction a glass of water provides come to enhance the pleasure we feel from a breeze on our cheek; and we may say that we are "drinking in" the coolness through our skin. Or again, the blue of the sky as we gaze one day out the window may call to mind the smooth coolness of a frozen pond of a winter long ago, and that blueness is then and there fuller, richer, more deeply experienced, and, therefore, more vitally integrated into the fabric which

clothes our existence in meaning. That we can transfer value provides for the possibility of continual development of our understanding of what we meet.

Since the mediation between our perceptions and the perceived object does not in the case of symbols reside in the act of sensing, as it does in the above examples, but in our own inner motives and interests, the basis on which the value is transferred depends not on the recurrence of a quality or feature belonging to the perceived object but to the sources of response from within. Symbols, we recall, appear in a variety of forms—laughter, smiles, tears, grimaces, as well as words; they represent in short, the language of behavior of every sort. There is a natural tendency to view each of the behavioral manifestations as a literal presentation of a feeling or conception, singular and unique at its origin rather than singular and unique in the circumstances of its objectification. But, in fact, we give our tears spontaneously to happy as well as unhappy endings, our laughter to embarrassing as well as funny situations, our anger to relief from fear as well as to frustrating or painful episodes. We might quite reasonably protest that the tears, the laughter, the anger are different in each instance of them; and we are right in so far as the outside circumstance for crying and laughing is different and that the difference affects the meanings they convey in the whole of their outward context. But apparently our sub-rational selves do not make these nice distinctions so prevalent in the world of fact, do not isolate feelings into the specific categories our rationality imposes. On the sub-rational level a vast circulating mixture of feeling and impulse goes on, oblivious to the differences of the many circumstances of their excitation, so that we find greatly varied, overtly unconnected, highly specific experiences gathering up and giving definitive, distinctive context to feelings which are, in fact, of a kind.

Thus it is that the basis for the transferring of values in symbolic experience is as natural a function of our nature as it is in sense experience, with the difference that it occurs through the commonality of the deep motives of which a given symbol is a particular embodiment rather than through

the common qualities perceived in the vast array of sense experiences.

And so, our "red, red rose," which came into flower for us first when we met it in relationships that developed qualities of warmth and sprightliness and lushness and gentleness, may be kept fresh for as long as we are capable of experiencing at all, of maintaining a relationship between ourselves and the material accessible to any type of perception. Yesterday we may have embellished the blossoming rose with the specific meaning of a lilting smile someone gave us; tomorrow we may bring to it, see it through, an experience as different from this as a sad ending is from a happy one but which somehow taps the same underground stream that flows beneath our rationality and that provides for every renewed experience of our poem the potential for its meaning to change and to grow.

Irvin Nahan

(see drawing, page 38)

Adapted from: Richard J. Wattenmaker,
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IRVIN NAHAN was born in Philadelphia in 1927. He attended the Pennsylvania Academy of The Fine Arts and is an alumnus of The Barnes Foundation's course in the philosophy and appreciation of art, as well as of the seminar program. In the summer of 1953, he travelled to Europe as a scholarship student of the Foundation. His work in oil, water color, and pen and ink has been exhibited a number of times in both group and one-man shows. At the present time he lives, with his wife and three children, in Hereford, Pennsylvania.

Of all its spiritual antecedents, Nahan's work in pen and ink bears the strongest resemblance to Matisse's line drawings, a resemblance arising out of a general predilection in both men for the decorative and the particular ease, sureness, and simplicity with which each renders his decorative effects in linear terms with a prevailing absence of light-and-shade modeling. Matisse's extraordinarily sensitive use of line and of ornamental embellishment provides a natural source which Nahan uses to help clarify his own vision. Yet, despite the apparent similarity of means, Nahan is saying something wholly and distinctively his own.

In Matisse's pen-and-ink work, the line is elaborately developed for its immediate appeal as a movemented, decorative entity; although the illustrative content is explicit—we can easily identify a rug or a face—features are selected from the subject principally for their contributions to the predominantly decorative design. Nahan, in contrast, plays up the illustrative aspect of his subjects, drawing out with his fine, graceful line a gentle substance of flesh and bone and thereby adding a warmth, a richness, a depth, we can even say a humanity, to the decorative impact of the whole—an expressive dimension that Matisse virtually ignored.

This divergence of pictorial interest between Nahan and Matisse carries over into the manner in which each artist

handles his line. In Matisse, the line is relatively simple and unvaried, holding within the most economical of means a highly concentrated affluence of decorative qualities; the compositions are made up of succinctly ordered linear rhythms that waste no energy in their terse immediacy of fulfilling the intent. In Nahan's work, on the other hand, the rhythmic themes take on a leniency and variety, the line is imbued with a discursively gentle and lyrical quality, and the compositions, though in no way inconclusive, convey the sense of having abandoned themselves to a multiplicity of linear effects—here a long, slow, flat curve defining a simple shape; there a thinly or thickly articulated volume to which the relative breadth of line imparts a certain weight; here a quick, detached wiggle or a swarming, abounding concentration of small strokes that animate a corner of space or a shadowed volume; there a firm emphasis of line that pins a unit down or sets it abruptly off from its surroundings; there an almost imperceptible sequence of touches that effects a breathless transition from object to space or that atmospherically pervades a space. And, correspondingly, he incorporates into his line two especially imaginative and original features. The first is his treatment of dark areas and small units in terms of clusters of short, fine lines and dots. The other, related to this, is his technique of dissolving, at varied intervals, the continuity of the line into a series of countless dainty dots and dashes. Both these innovations invest the graceful precision of his drawing with an intricate, full, airy delicacy reminiscent of the lively minutiae of nature on a warm summer afternoon. The broken outline softens and animates the shape contained by it—without, however, losing its definite control—at the same time that it opens out the figure or object thus made to its surroundings to seep into the substance it encloses; similarly, the fineness of line and dot that make up the denser areas of swarming shadow, hair, cloth, or foliage allows for an effusion of light into these that bestows upon the whole a delicate naturalism that is all Nahan's. He ventures quite on his own far into an exotic region populated by a multitude of rhythmic patterns constantly refined, rediscovered, renewed—creating for us a fantastical land in which the decorative and illustrative

merge to capture between them, and hold so that we might henceforth have access to, qualities belonging to an effervescent dream of Arcadia. Thus, we see that, though Nahan and Matisse elaborate the decorative aspects of the visual world, they do so each with his own perception of essential values.

Above and beyond the particular features which distinguish Nahan's drawings from Matisse's is the fact that Nahan's picture ideas derive from a totally different approach to linear composition. Nahan often makes individual drawings of a figure before casting it into a compositional context, resulting in somewhat of a separation between figure and setting which emphasizes his illustrative interest by its insistence on the identity of the main picture unit. In this effect, he recalls such men as Antonio Pollaiuolo and Brueghel the Elder, whose works convey the feeling of figures having been made to fit into a specific compositional scheme. Modifying this effect is Nahan's organization of the overall picture surface into "plain and print" areas adapted from the nineteenth-century Japanese woodcut prints; the free abundance and spilling over of the "print" areas and the light air of abandon with which they are distributed introduce a sense of spontaneity and of pervasive decorativeness not to be found in the more formal Oriental source.

Another characteristic which distinguishes Nahan's line from Matisse's is what Nahan has in common with Ingres. Like Ingres's, Nahan's linear motifs are long and continuous, and while, unlike Ingres's, they are frequently broken into dots and secondary decorative flourishes along the way to their ultimate destination, they share with Ingres—and to some extent with Picasso, Modigliani, and nineteenth-century Japanese woodcut prints—a fluid, clear-cut grace, a precision, a crisp fineness akin to that of the incisive line of a drypoint engraving. Nahan's decorative, purposeful "detours" differentiate his line radically from Ingres's. His is supple and free-flowing where Ingres's is brittle and restrained.

The gentle, lyrical, yet voluptuous substance which Nahan realizes with line alone discloses an affinity also with such artists as Renoir, Giorgione, Paschin, and Rubens. With Rubens

he has in common a curvilinear saturation of the picture area, and with Renoir and Giorgione he shares a penchant for the monumental grace of the female figure, conveying in his line what they convey in full-bodied color—his linear arabesque transforming the shape of the figure into swirls of three-dimensional units. He used Pascin's rhythmic elasticity of line and volume for what it could contribute to the immediate, lively character of the illustrative content. Pascin's influence can also be seen in the use of dramatic shifts in scale between proximate units which lends a quickness to the in-and-out rhythms of space composition and, further, plays a variation, this time in terms of picture units, on the terse, animated, dainty theme initiated by the stippled, lilting line itself.

Nahan's own vision at all times prevails over the multitudinous influences he has absorbed, so that these serve solely to enrich his own decorative-illustrative expression. What he has learned from the array of predecessors to whom his work is related he has learned because of a keen and purposeful sensitivity to their presentation of these qualities by which he re-creates for us the world we live in. His recreation is done with so rich a personal insight, so full yet sophisticated a naturalism, that what emerges is a new world altogether, complete in itself as a fantasy of nature in which the luxurious, the spontaneous, the sensuous, the vivacious, the gentle, the lyrical, the mellow, the exotic, all convincingly answer for its purpose.

The Art Department *of* The Barnes Foundation

I. FACULTY

VIOLETTE DE MAZIA
Director of Education

BARTON CHURCH

ANGELO PINTO

HARRY SEFARBI

II. OBJECTIVES

THE educational program of the Art Department of the Barnes Foundation consists of a basic two-year course in the philosophy and appreciation of art and an advanced seminar program for special studies. In the classroom the objective method of science, as set forth in the teachings of John Dewey and developed through its application to the study of art by Albert C. Barnes and Violette de Mazia, is brought to bear on the problem of “learning to see.” While works of art provide the essential context for demonstration of the material taught, stress is laid on the natural relationship that exists between art and everyday life, in that those human values which give art its actual and abiding significance are the very same as those inherent in any and all purposeful, intelligent human activity—whether it be the practice of a profession, the reading of a book, the watching of a ball game, or the simple daily exchanges one makes with the people and things around him. Education is regarded not as an episode of life in which information about a field of inquiry is acquired but as a process of living, the total impact of which is to develop and enrich the participating student’s ability to deal effectively with the world in which he lives.

III. BASIC PROGRAM

In practice, the Foundation’s educational approach entails the training of the student in genuine perceptive thinking.

During the first year of study the fundamental principles on which esthetic value is based are established and explored. The systematic building of an intelligent set of criteria for judgement and appreciation begins, as it must, with the clearing away of the misconceptions fostered by the cult of subjectivity and dissociated fact-collecting prevailing over typical practices of art education. Subsequently, each constructive concept is subjected, as it is introduced, to the test of objective verification in the form of picture analysis and a relevant application to concrete situations of everyday life—a procedure that at once draws from the principles the full quota of their power to illuminate a problem at hand as it affords the student an experience by which those principles are made permanently and instrumentally a part of his own resources for understanding whatever he may encounter thereafter. The principles are also examined and further expanded in an intensive study of the creative development of such individual artists as Renoir, Cézanne, Glackens, Maurice Prendergast, and Matisse—a lesson which is reflected in the make-up of the Foundation's collection.

The second-year course is primarily concerned with the direct application of the principles learned to a comprehensive study of the major traditions of Western painting. In art, as in any field of human endeavor, no legitimate assessment, either of the contributions to an on-going body of discoveries and achievements made by a society or of the personal creativeness of a given individual, can be made without a knowledge of what has been accomplished in the whole of the field.

All classes meet on a weekly basis for two- to four-and-a-half-hour sessions throughout the scholastic year. There are no tuition fees. The student body is made up of people of varied fields of interest and all walks of life. The resulting diversity in the questions and contributions by individual class members is an integral part of the educational process. A genuine interest in learning is the only prerequisite for consideration for admission to the program, and total enrollment is determined solely by the limitations of the teaching facilities. Class attendance is required.

IV. SEMINAR STUDIES

The seminar program in advanced studies has as its objectives the provision of a forum under the guidance of the Foundation's staff for the independent study and discussion of the principles of the objective method in their application to fields of interest other than painting. Its effect has been to further the educational experience and to deepen the student's understanding of the philosophy underlying the Foundation's approach. In addition, a significant body of work is emerging from the students' efforts.

Class procedure consists of the presentation of talks by the students, followed by periods of general discussion. The subject through which the principles of the objective method are explored is determined by each speaker according to his own special field of interest and has ranged over such subjects as architecture, engineering, teaching techniques, drama, literature, and dance, as well as many others. On occasion, several students independently develop the same topic, which lends an interest in the individuality of treatment and comprehension.

Students enrolled in the program are divided into two sections which meet on a bi-weekly basis during the scholastic year. Each section is broken down into a group of active participants, consisting of those who intend to prepare material for presentation and to take part in class discussion, and a non-active audience. Members who wish to change their status are permitted to do so.

From the active group of each section a small nucleus of experienced students is drawn to serve as a "critical board." The board meets on the alternate weeks with the speaker scheduled for the next class session to listen to and make constructive suggestions on his material. This policy not only provides the student with a valuable practice session but also has proven to afford him fresh insight into his own thinking that results in a fuller and more satisfying learning experience.

Plans are now under way further to enlarge the advanced studies to meet the increasing number of applications. Requirements for admission to the seminar are the same as those for the two-year course, with the addition that applicants must have completed the Foundation's basic studies.

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